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ART COURSES IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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Courses which deal with art in some way or other are now to be found in practically all high schools of any recognized standing. School boards realize that unless a study of art is included in the curriculum most of the pupils will probably develop no systematic acquaintance with this field of historical material. Their enjoyment of art will depend upon accidental influence, while the building up of aesthetic standards, so necessary to industrial and artistic progress, will be neglected. Works of art present, at first hand or through the medium of reproductions, actual material which has been worked upon by people of different lands and times. If rightly directed, the study of this material gives a peculiarly intimate contact, by a means other than and supplementary to that of language, with the aesthetic ideals embodied in works of art. It discovers also the way in which styles have developed, and the manner in which the work of one period or country has influenced that of another. Art material is of genuine value for all courses, from the classical to the industrial. Its influence is equally strong in the realm of academic culture and in the field of commercial industry.

Theoretically, few high schools are willing to permit a neglect of this field. In practice, however, superintendents and principals do not always find it easy to decide upon the nature and program of the courses in art. In almost every instance the following difficulties present themselves:

1. Seldom are there any accepted standards of attainment in drawing or design in elementary schools, which can serve as a dependable basis for high-school work in art. High-school instructors very frequently find it necessary to proceed on the assumption that the entering classes know little or nothing of the subject.
2. The majority of high-school instructors have been trained in art-school customs of teaching, and these studio customs, even

in the cases where one is justified in designating them as methods, are generally adapted only to those who possess special aptitude for drawing. These methods minister to interest where it already exists but are seldom planned to develop interest where it is lacking. The instructor gathers his knowledge of education only incidentally, and is therefore more likely to be interested in art for art's sake than in the place of art in general education.

3. The tradition is still prevalent that art is in a peculiar sense a special subject which has little of value to offer except for persons of unique and rare inherent gifts. There is, therefore, a tendency for only a talented few to elect that subject in high schools. As a natural consequence courses are likely to be adapted to these few. Fortunately our educational and industrial progress is making clear the fact that art has very much the same sort of relation to rare aptitudes on the one hand and general abilities on the other that literature or mathematics possesses, or in fact any other subject which opens a vista for a high degree of specialization and at the same time touches common experience at innumerable points.

Under present conditions, what sort of courses will minimize these difficulties and meet the very general need of the whole student body for some kind of art education, neglecting neither those who have nor those who have not special artistic inclinations? In answer to this question, courses of three sorts are suggested, as follows:

I. Courses in drawing and design which are closely connected with industrial subjects, as, for example, with shopwork and with household art. The articulation of these courses is dependent upon sympathetic co-operation between the teacher of constructive work and the teacher of art. This co-operation is too often limited to occasional conferences, as a result of which there is a more or less incidental discovery of a common ground. The articulation becomes much more vital when the courses are related administratively. A method which has proved workable consists in a program arrangement which allows the periods in drawing and in the shopwork or household art laboratory to alternate. This arrangement makes certain that in drawing and design the pupils shall be provided with definite material in which they are already interested constructively. In the shop the children are busy with

plans for changing this material into forms which are useful and in good taste. This prospective or actually occurring change in the material awakens an interest in many pupils who display no enthusiasm in representing "still life."

In courses thus dovetailed, the work in drawing and design tends to follow these general lines:

1. Drawing to describe construction. This requires:

a) Sketches directly from objects. These involve all the principles of perspective and proportions that are studied when drawing is taught as an isolated studio subject.

b) Sketches for the purpose of experimenting with ideas.

c) Patterns and working drawings which embody the results of previous experimentation.

2. Design for construction and decoration. This requires:

a) Consideration of the materials and other specifications for the object, and of the conditions under which it is to be used, and experimentation with, and comparison of, various possibilities to determine which is best fitted to the purposes in view.

b) Study of good styles and the adaptation of them to the problem in hand. In any particular instance, for example in the designing of furniture or of costume, this involves on the one hand a study of the history and development of styles and a knowledge from books and museums of the best which the past has produced, and on the other, a practical acquaintance with modern products and processes and with the current fashions, as displayed in trade literature and advertisements and in stores.

One objection to co-ordinating art and shop courses which is sometimes offered is that drawing proceeds more swiftly than constructive work and therefore in closely articulated courses it must mark time while waiting on the slower processes of actual construction. This difficulty may be readily met, because drawing and design can be indefinitely elaborated at any point by the use of related problems with which there is not time to deal in terms of actual construction. The study of perspective can be carried farther than the actual needs of construction demand. Light and shade may be introduced, etc. In designing, the opportunities for study and practice in drawing, composition, and color related to the problems in hand are unlimited. In studying design

the problems need not and should not be confined to the actual making of designs. Much experience in choosing from many possibilities, such as those offered in a department store, is in many cases of equal value. Furniture, vases, wall paper, and the many other articles of general use furnish good opportunity for practical selection, which exercises taste in a manner different from that involved in actual designing and making. Ability to choose from among proffered designs, rather than to originate designs, is after all what people are called upon most often to exercise.

One frequently meets the objection that by such courses as these art is made the handmaid of industry. The vigor with which this is urged is usually in obverse ratio to the knowledge of the objector regarding the history of the conditions under which the best art, fine and industrial, has been produced. Fig. 1 shows drawings worked out in a high-school class in the School of Education, where the class periods for drawing alternated with those for shopwork.

II. Courses in pictorial drawing. In general aim these courses correspond somewhat to the traditional high-school art course and appeal more particularly to pupils with special art interests. Their appeal will be much wider than that of the traditional high-school art course, however, if the instructor notices the development in art interests which generally takes place at about the time children enter high school. The chief characteristics of these maturing interests as compared with those of elementary-school children appear to be in general as follows:

1. At high-school age children show more ability to appreciate and to make use of theory in connection with practice. This is notably true in regard to perspective, light and shade, color and composition. My observation leads me to conclude that it is a mistake to present, except very incidentally, any of the theory of these subjects to children in the lower elementary grades, or any considerable amount in the upper grades.

2. At high-school age children readily develop an interest in technical style and in the artistic possibilities of different mediums and tools. Each of the various mediums in common use—pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, etching, water colors, and oil colors—has its unique possibilities of treatment, which, when mastered, con-

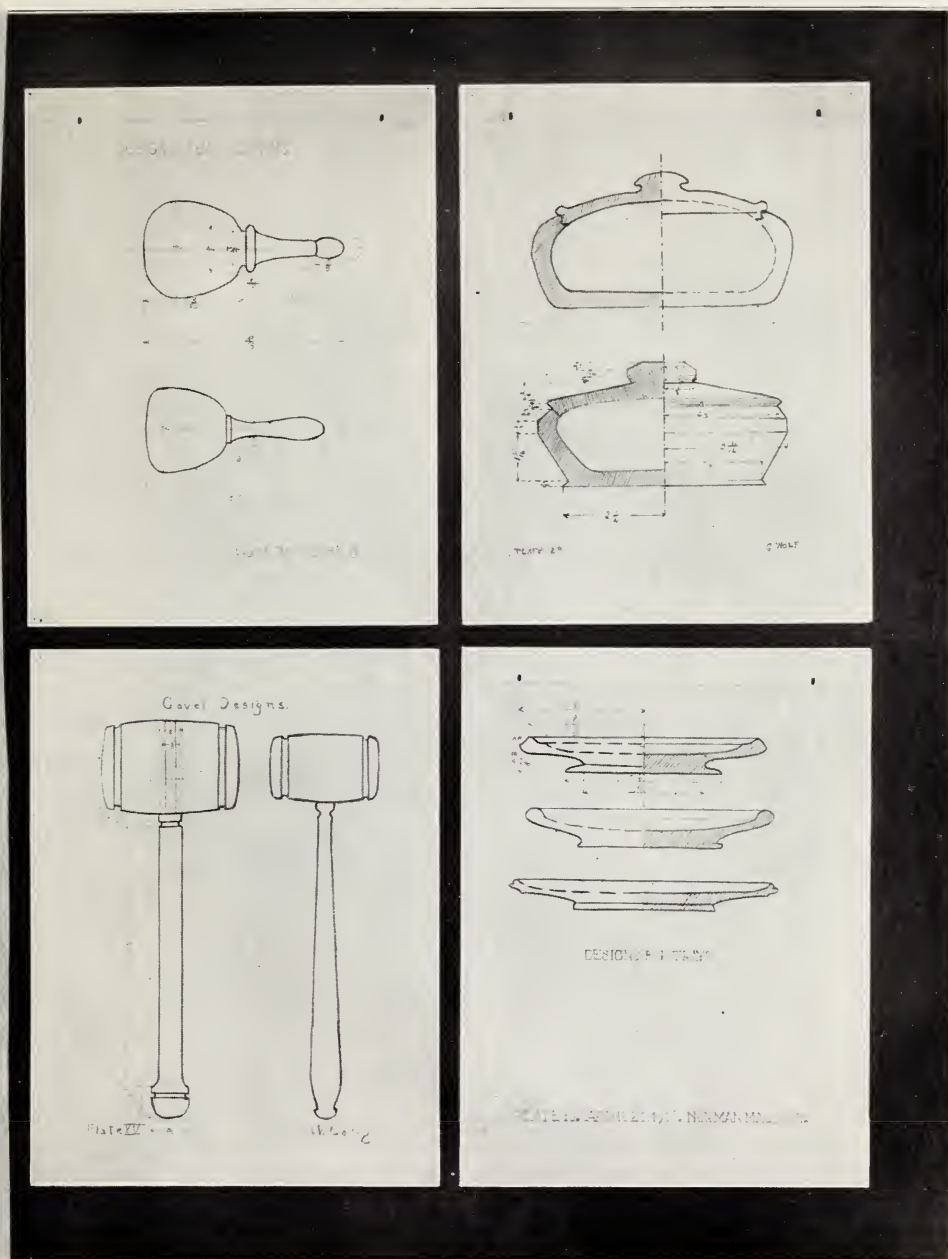


FIG. 1

stitute a particular beauty of style. The clean-cut brilliancy of the absolute blacks of pen and ink differs essentially from the softer tones and graded grays of pencil. Both of these present a contrast to the massed shades of charcoal. Water color differs from oil color in the tones it can produce and the moods it can express. Each medium by its nature compels a different analysis of the appearances which it is used to represent, in a way comparable to that in which various languages by their structure compel different analyses of thought.

One important element of artistic enjoyment consists in an appreciation of the appropriateness of the medium to the subject, and the satisfaction in perceiving that many of the elements of style are the inevitable outgrowth of the nature of the medium. We may be interested in the cleverness which succeeds in making water color imitate oil or embroidery simulate painting, or pen and ink copy the photograph, but we cannot admire the taste.

With this point of view practice with any given medium has only as its preliminary aim the mastery of the more elemental technical difficulties of that medium. Its final and more important aim is an introduction to the historic ways in which that medium has been used as a means of artistic expression, and an appreciation of the kinds of interpretation of ideas and beauty of style for which it is peculiarly appropriate. This knowledge of the characteristics of different mediums gives a new and definite interest to the study of works of art, and furnishes one of the means of comparing excellence with mediocrity and of contrasting one kind of excellence with another.

3. In the high school the practice of accustoming a student to the practical methods of procedure which an artist usually employs, namely, of sketching out his ideas in tentative form and then gathering material by which gradually to elaborate and perfect them, can be carried much farther than in elementary grades. This line of study in elementary schools has been discussed in detail elsewhere.¹ Throughout school life it is one of the most important factors in developing success in learning to draw.

¹ Sargent and Miller, *How Children Learn to Draw*. (Now in Press.) Boston: Ginn & Co.

The attitude of mind of the child untrained in a workable method of procedure is essentially different from that of another with no more skill of hand but with a knowledge of how to go to work to develop a theme in drawing. The first child, when asked to illustrate a theme in history or geography or literature, will make a crude sketch and then, finding himself at the end of his ability and knowledge in portraying the subject, will be discouraged. The second child regards his initial sketch merely as the first of a series of steps. Having made it, he sees where his knowledge of the forms involved is lacking. If mountains or animals enter into the subject he finds examples of these in nature or in pictures and makes studies until he is familiar with the forms. Every fresh bit of information adds to his ability to deal with the subject, and every new attempt increases that facility which always precedes style.

By the time children enter high school they should have been trained in the gathering and using of reference material for given themes. Without this preparation they do not know that essential of progress, namely, how to go to work independently to learn to draw and design and compose material for an assigned topic. In high school, industry in the search for reference material, and originality in utilizing it, can be carried much farther than in elementary schools, especially in matters of good artistic style, and in adaptation of illustrations and designs to the particular uses for which they are intended. The making of a poster should lead to a search in printers' magazines such as the *Inland Printer*; in artists' magazines, for example, the *International Studio*; in books which describe the methods and results of the finest designers and letterers and present standards of inscriptive design, for example, *Writing, Lettering and Illuminating*, by Edward Johnston.

Drawing and illustration should lead to a study of the best magazine and book illustrations to find out how the mediums used for illustrative work can best express certain pictorial effects.

In connection with working out their own pictorial themes the pupils will probably read with greater appreciation some of the passages, common in books on the lives of artists, which describe their repeated attempts and long-continued study in connection

with certain pictures. They will find repeated in their own work what occurs in the production of so many works of art, namely, the preliminary sketches, the gathering and assimilating of necessary knowledge, the period of discouragement in a greater or less degree at some point, and the final completion.

III. A course of illustrated lectures and readings comprising a survey of art. Fortunately courses of this kind are becoming common in high schools. They give acquaintance with the salient characteristics of architecture, painting, sculpture, and industrial design of the chief historic periods of art. They also bring to the attention of the pupils the more important masterpieces of these periods.

In describing a course of this type given by him in the Ethical Culture School in New York City, Mr. James Hall outlines what might well be the aim and scope of such a course in any high school. He says in part:

The course in art appreciation is open to all high-school pupils. For those taking the regular art course, it is intended to supplement the technical study. It also aims, so far as is possible, to provide for those pupils, who are not sufficiently interested in art practice to elect the regular art courses, but who wish to learn to look at pictures and other works of art intelligently and appreciatively.

This course consists of a series of weekly talks illustrated by stereopticon slides and otherwise, and a certain amount of required reading.

Art, especially painting, is considered as a language for the expression of idea and emotion, and comparisons are drawn between the painter's art and that of the musician and of the writer.

After defining the field of painting, the terms of the painter's language, line, dark and light, and color are discussed, as to their possibilities of expressing visual ideas and of suggesting emotions. . . . After the preliminary consideration comes a general survey of the history of painting. . . . Only the most important painters are studied, and these by a series of comparisons which not only bring out sharply the individual characteristics of their work but also lead to an understanding of the ideals of the period and of the country in which they lived. For example, the painters of the Renaissance show clearly, both in their subjects and in the treatment of their pictures, the newly acquired interest in the classics, the growth of scientific knowledge, and the increasing value set upon individuality which was beginning to permeate the life of the period. Thus the course may throw a side light upon other studies, as history and literature.

But the chief result aimed for is a broadened idea of the meaning of art; a serious desire to look at each picture, so far as possible, from the standpoint of its painter, and some power to respond to the appeal of form and color. With these habits of mind, a pupil at least will realize that he should carefully consider a picture before deciding whether he likes or dislikes it, and through contact with the serious pictorial expression of the great artists his own personality cannot fail to be enriched and his sympathies widened and deepened.

The course ends with two or three talks on architecture, which touch upon some of the principles of architectural composition as shown in examples of the great styles of architecture, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Gothic, and Renaissance. Only the more obvious distinguishing characteristics of these styles can be considered in a few typical examples.

One or more visits to the Metropolitan Museum are made with the class, in order to point out some of the more important examples of original work by the painters who have been studied.

Regarding a course of this general character Mr. Fred H. Daniels, supervisor of art instruction in the schools of Newton, Massachusetts, speaks, in part, as follows:

In the Newton, Massachusetts, high schools there is offered a fine arts course. Once a week the students taking this course, about fifty in number, assemble in the school hall to hear a lecture on art appreciation. These lectures are given by the supervisor of drawing and are all illustrated by stereopticon slides or by blackboard drawings. During the four-year course the students hear about one hundred and fifty such talks. The students are required to take and record adequate notes in their notebooks, which are marked and corrected each week. The only required notebook illustrations are those which the students may draw.

This course is distinctly aimed at art appreciation and enjoyment. The instructor searches for interesting material to present to the class, believing that high-school students, particularly high-school art students, should enjoy their work, and that their work should be of such a nature that it can be enjoyed by normal boys and girls. Technical terms and the more formal matters of art history are reserved for a fuller maturity in art school or college.

In the high school of the School of Education the course in survey of art is elective. The class meets daily. The study is assigned by means of historical and critical outlines and library references. Each pupil keeps a notebook in which are mounted reproductions of works of art, together with tracings of details of design, etc. In these books are kept also historical outlines, descriptions of some of the masterpieces, records of visits to the museums, and other data of interest. Fig. 2 shows the manner in

which these books are arranged. In this way the pupils gain a knowledge of the main lines of artistic development throughout the history of the world. They have a suggestion of the problems which artists of different times have endeavored to solve, especially those problems with which modern art is engaged, and they see how these are related to and have grown out of those of the past.

Courses of the three types described in this article meet the needs of the majority of high-school pupils. The courses connected with industrial subjects may readily be based on any line of constructive activity which appears in the school course or in the local industries. The courses in advanced drawing may be highly technical where the number of pupils who have a special interest in art is sufficiently large to justify this policy, or they may be related to other school subjects, even to the point where one of the chief aims will be to give skill in illustrating these subjects.

The courses in the survey of art, or appreciation of art, meet the needs of those who have no technical skill but who wish an introduction to the field of art.

In high schools where art instruction is largely of the traditional studio type and appeals mainly to those with special talents in that direction it is rightly placed on the list of elective studies. However, the place of art in modern social and industrial life and its actual influence upon affairs are now so important that where the work is wisely planned to meet a wide range of interests it would seem that some sort of contact with the subject should be compulsory.

One difficulty in administering art courses so that there is progression in the work arises from the lack of uniformity of attainment in the pupils who enter high schools. Consequently one usually finds in the same course students from every class. In large high schools, classes may be subdivided and graded in this way. In small high schools with only one or, at most, two instructors, grading is facilitated by giving a distinctive character to each course. For example, with the classification of courses here suggested pupils tend to elect early in the school course the work related to industrial activities, and to turn later to the pictorial drawing and to study planned to give a historical survey and to develop artistic appreciation.



FIG. 2

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